

JOSEPH PRINCE TRACY

1879-1953

It is with a deep sense of loss that the attention of the botanical public is called to the death of Joseph P. Tracy which occurred, after a long illness, in Eureka, California, on November 26, 1953.



To the efforts of no other individual are we so beholden as we are to his for the knowledge of the flora of the northwestern counties, particularly Humboldt, which is now at our command. Although he left no legacy of publications on that flora, his large collection of specimens, which comprised a private herbarium kept at his home in Eureka and which he bequeathed to the Herbarium of the University of California, bears eloquent testimony to his devotion to his chosen field. The botanical library which he likewise left to the University indicates the thoroughness and scholarliness of his approach to the problems of the evaluation of taxa and the identification of specimens, always with due regard for the views

of monographers. He corresponded with botanical specialists and, when his own efforts did not satisfy him, he submitted many of his critical specimens to them for their expert opinions. Mr. Tracy's field work extended over the last fifty years of his life, during which period he presented to both the Jepson and the University herbaria, but mostly to the latter, some thirty thousand of his duplicates. Many of these were distributed to herbaria throughout the world where they now reside as valued accessions. More than a few of his specimens have formed the basis for new species, many of which have been named for him. In 1937, Dr. S. F. Blake published in his honor the genus *Tracyina* as an entirely new entity (*T. rostrata*) in the Compositae.

Mr. Tracy was born on January 11, 1879, in Hydesville, Humboldt County, California, in the low broad valley formed where the Eel and Van Duzen rivers meet. His parents, both of New England stock, were Joseph Tracy and Harriet Morris, and from his father, who surveyed many of the roads and land lines in the early northern California of that day, young Joe acquired his interest in the land which was later to lead

to his choice of vocation. Despite his outdoor activities, he was not a strong boy, uninclined in consequence to compete in the more rigorous activities of boys of his own age. Instead he was wont to wander in the nearby redwoods and grassy hillsides, storing up the impressions which were to culminate in his avocational devotion to matters botanical. His mother's family settled on a ranch on Howell Mountain near St. Helena in Napa County, which later was acquired by the University of California and is now known as "Las Posadas State Forest." There Joe spent summer vacations visiting his uncle, John M. Morris, who owned the ranch, whence many of the "extra-territorial" specimens of earlier days in Tracy's collections.

When Joe was eleven years old, his family moved to Eureka, which subsequently became his permanent home. His father was Register of Public Lands there, and Joe spent much time working with him, gaining an intimate knowledge of land titles and an appreciation of their importance. Meanwhile, he attended high school in Eureka, graduated with the first class and was among the first students who entered the University of California from Eureka. At the University, his interest in science soon became dominant, and he devoted much of his work there to botany, chemistry and physics. Among his instructors in botany were the young H. M. Hall and Dr. J. Burt Davy, while his heightening interest in his now chosen field was directed by both Dr. Jepson and Dr. Setchell. During this time he served as a student assistant in the Herbarium. Notable among his classmates were Herbert M. Evans and E. B. Babcock.

During Mr. Tracy's final college year his father died, necessitating his return to Eureka to take upon himself the support of his mother and a younger brother and sister, but he returned to finish his college work. Despite the handicaps, he was honored with memberships in both Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi and succeeded in earning his A.B. in three and a half years, thus graduating with the class of 1903. He had hoped to return later for graduate work and higher degrees, intentions which he never was able to realize. Nevertheless, through the years, he maintained, to mutual advantage, a close association with colleagues at the University of California and the California Academy of Sciences.

Upon his return to Eureka in 1904, he looked for suitable employment. His early training in land surveying with his father came to his aid in this connection, and he soon found congenial employment with the Belcher Abstract and Title Company, by which firm he was employed until his death. "By those who had occasion to require . . . service in the matter of the authentication or clearance of land titles", Joseph Tracy "was acknowledged as an expert in this field, and deeds, titles and other documents relating to land ownership or transfer . . . bear the imprint of his training, skill and judgment," as the "Humboldt-Standard" editorialized in its obituary notice.

All the while, he followed his botanical bent as an avocation, collecting in his spare time. He was a familiar sight in the woods and hills of the

northwestern counties, with his plant press and his fish-creel, and during deer season, his gun, in his oft-times well-worn Ford car on the less frequented byways of his district. His fine collection of horns on the walls of his home herbarium bore witness to his marksmanship, for almost every year, Joe "brot home his buck." Besides his abiding concern with the plant life of the region, Joe's kindred interests extended to an acquaintance as well with the soils and geological formations he encountered.

Another interest was music, and for many years his true tenor voice was heard in his church choir and in the choral societies of which he was so devoted a member.

Mr. Tracy was generous of his time and interests, happy to aid any one who showed a genuine interest in natural history. He was glad to help students and spent many an evening with them, feeling amply rewarded by their later accomplishments in the botanical field. He cooperated often with County Farm Advisors, while never a summer passed without several visits from fellow botanists and students.

In his later years, his plant collections extended more and more to counties other than Humboldt and adjacent Trinity County. On his forays into Del Norte and contiguous Siskiyou County and southwestern Oregon, he made many joint collections, a large share of them mycological, with Mr. Harold Parks of Trinidad, formerly of the Department of Botany at the University of California. His frequent collecting trips to Trinity Summit and the Salmon Mountains were facilitated by his possession of a cabin and a plot of land close to that of one of his sisters at Willow Creek. Frequently accompanying him on these trips were his brother-in-law, Judge Frank A. Graham of Willow Creek, and his young nephew, Joseph T. Gregory, who later joined the staff of the Peabody Museum of Paleontology at Yale University.

Mr. Tracy is survived by two sisters, Mrs. Harriett Graham of Willow Creek, and Miss Ethel Tracy of Eureka, who so kindly supplied many of the biographical details, especially of Joe's earlier life, as well as by two nieces, Mrs. Phillip DeLong of Eureka and Miss Grace Tracy of Oakland, and by his nephew, Dr. Joseph T. Gregory of New Haven, Conn.

In addition to his membership in the California Botanical Society, Mr. Tracy took an active part in the work of the Save-the-Redwoods League and was a member of the following societies: American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geographic Society and the California Academy of Sciences.

Joe Tracy is recalled by his friends and all who knew him as a gentle, kindly, and modest gentleman, generous of himself and eager to share his knowledge. He was highly respected and valued by his business associates and by those who sought his expert assistance on title and documentary matters. His lasting monument is embodied in the large and significant personal herbarium which is soon to be incorporated into that of the University of California.—RIMO BACIGALUPI, Department of Botany, University of California.